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National and Ethnic Identities
and Local Boundaries

UNIT THIRTEEN

Introduction to
Ethnography for
Language Learners

National and Ethnic Identities and Local Boundaries

UNIT THIRTEEN

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CONTENTS

Section 1	
1. Introduction	1
2. Links with other units	2
3. Background notes	3
Section 2	
1. Outline of a session	9
2. Description of a session	9
3. Advice and comments	13
Section 3	
1. Assignment	15
2. Handouts	17
3. Readings	18

SECTION ONE

1. Introduction

The Scots are taken seriously. We, by and large, are not. We are defined in the English mind by our national caricature. The dattest cliché in the film director's manual – coal-dust covered men singing in perfect harmony as they trudge back to the cottages from the pit – may fade away now the pits have closed. But don't bank on it. To a large extent we connive in the creation of our cultural caricature. Why, if a play or short story comes from Wales, must the plot invariably be set in a Welsh village peopled entirely by women called Bloddie and men called Dai Coffin-Maker or Jones-the-Something-or-Other? And why must they all have IQs of 10 but be very, very cunning? And why must half the characters sound as though they're Peter Sellers imitating a doctor from Madras?

(John Humphrys (1996) 'Time to Blow all the coal-dust clichés away'. 13. *Western Mail*, 20 March)

Over the last decade or so, 'identity' has become a major focus of academic studies in practically all discipline areas of the humanities and social sciences. The question of national distinctiveness is regularly foregrounded in the British media, its appearance generated by either steps towards devolution within the U.K. or steps towards further integration with Europe. Recent television documentaries investigating identity and broadcast at prime viewing-time (e.g. Darcus Howe's *White Tribe* series and Andrew Marr's *The Day Britain Died*, both screened early in 2000) suggest that the trend is not only set to continue but that it is accelerating. The questions 'who are we?' and 'who will we be?' are being revisited on an almost daily basis.

This unit is designed to help students examine the perennially difficult concepts of nationality, identity and ethnicity from a more anthropological perspective by exploring how these are perceived in terms of belonging, and the boundaries that construct a group's sense of being a group.

It is impossible here even to sketch the main arguments raised by sociologists, historians, anthropologists and political scientists on the issues of nation and ethnicity. All these notes can do is alert students to some of the preconceptions and over-determined views which are the currency of much media discussion and which may well have formed the assumptions of language students with little or no background in the social sciences. The unit aims to question, for example, the notion of France as a homogenised nation state or of the Germans or Spaniards as societies sharing a common set of values in an unproblematic way. It also aims to develop an understanding of groups and individuals having not one identity but multiple, and perhaps in some cases conflicting, identities. It introduces the idea of identity as a set of processes rather than as a given, by exploring what is meant by 'identity construction' or 'identity maintenance'. It should help students to question the processes of national stereotyping and to be sensitive to the ways in which various groups present and represent themselves and maintain their identity and sense of belonging.

The unit will also lead students to consider what the importance of such issues may be in the context of their ethnographic research. It is useful in terms of reinforcing reflexivity about their own position on the periphery of the target culture when they go abroad, and is drawn on to some degree by most student ethnographic projects which deal with local groups.

2. Links with other units

Because the themes of group identity, belonging, the presentation of the self and perceptions of otherness are frequently explored in the course, this unit has numerous links with others. Units regularly return to examine mechanisms involved in what Wolfgang Kaschuba has called 'the construction of we-feelings' (1995: 246). They normally do so on a more micro level, however, so the work on national and ethnic identity involved here effects an important shift of perspective in terms of how *larger* entities perceive and represent themselves, and are perceived by others. Some of the work on local identity done here – particularly the recommended further reading on Kibronen in Northern Ireland – is also useful in suggesting how local and national levels of belonging coexist and permeate each other.

Ideas students have examined in earlier course units and which should be reinforced here include those around shared cultural knowledge and socialisation, and the constructed identity of the family group or the peer group. Béatrix le Wit's study of the way the closed unit of the French bourgeois family presents itself to itself and to others (Unit 5) or Paul Willis's study of a group of working-class lads defining their identity in contradistinction to the dominant norms and values of the school (Unit 7) both relate to the ideas of identity-construction and boundaries that are developed here. Unit 6 which explores gender identity as something that is socially constructed rather than given and natural is a further overlap. Finally, links may be drawn with Unit 3 on social space as well. The reading for that unit develops the idea that we use boundaries, both tangible and symbolic, to separate particular groups or spheres of activity from each other and hence to retain a sharp awareness of their distinctiveness.

Subsequent units also have strong connections to the concepts introduced here. Local Level Politics (Unit 15), for example, explores the modes and regulation of gift-giving and exchange within a variety of cultural groups as a shared set of practices constituting the 'social glue' that keeps a community together and a vital part of its identity. Unit 16 dealing with symbolic classification explores aspects of group behaviour such as shared eating habits, dress codes, or perceptions of the body as powerful ways of affirming group belonging and as symbolic boundary markers that perpetuate the binary 'inside/outside', 'them/us' divisions. Finally, there are some links with later work on Language and Identity (Unit 14), which looks at conversational style as a marker of belonging.

3. Background notes

It is important to make the distinction between 'nation' and 'ethnic group'. As Hobsbawm (1992) suggests, the nation is a *political* unity, imposed often on many different linguistic and ethnic groups: what Williams and Smith (1983) call 'the national construction of social space'. To demonstrate the point, Hobsbawm quotes Massimo d'Azeoglio who said after Italy had been politically unified, 'We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians.'

Ethnicity, on the other hand, is a sense of group identity, a sense of what makes 'us' different from 'them' that is not imposed from without. Anthropologists have argued that it is at the boundaries that ethnicity becomes meaningful (Barth, 1969) and that the symbolic aspects of boundary marking are particularly revealing of group identity. John Edwards in *Language, Society and Identity* gives a useful, summarising definition of ethnic identity: that is, '[...] allegiance to a group... with which one has ancestral links. There is no necessity for a continuation, over generations, of the same socialisation or cultural patterns, but some sense of a group boundary must persist. This can be done by shared objective characteristics (language, religion, etc.) or by more subjective contributions to a sense of 'groupness' or by some continuation of both. Symbolic or subjective attachments must relate, at however distant a remove, to an observably real past.' (1985: 10)

The confusion over nationality and ethnicity that often arises does so because of the tendency since the nineteenth century to draw national boundaries on ethno-linguistic lines. This is what Forsythe is referring to in the student reading (see Section 3) when she makes a distinction between nationalism and nationalism in which nationalism corresponds to politico-geographic boundaries and nationalism to socio-cultural and ideological identities. Gellner also draws out this distinction in *Nations and Nationalism* (1983).

This tendency to draw national boundaries on ethno-linguistic lines has been visible particularly in Eastern Europe, where at the end of the twentieth century, nation states have been falling apart. Indeed, Alter (1989) defines a nation as 'a social group [...] which has become conscious of its coherence, unity and particular interests [and which] is constituted by the social group's consciousness of being a nation'. This begins to sound rather like the sense of a group as defined in 'ethnicity' or what Edwards (1985) terms 'self-conscious ethnicity'.

Many writers have recently written about the nation as an 'imagined community' (e.g. Anderson, 1983). In other words, although nations may feel very real to us, there is nothing natural about them. The citizens of a nation are encouraged to imagine themselves as members of one community, but within any nation there can be real differences (e.g. Northern Ireland or ex-Yugoslavia). Similarly, throughout Europe there are groups who consider themselves to be part of a people defined by a different nation state. For example, there are many 'German' Russians who consider themselves German although they can speak little or no German and have never lived in Germany.

The community is an 'imagined' one because it is a construction of commonality out of differences. This is a mythical, symbolic and ideological process as much as a

material one. It is concerned with how a nation represents itself both to outsiders and to itself. Michael Billig (1995) in a study of what he calls 'banal nationalism', examines how the homeland is 'flagged' on a daily basis in the media by political speeches, by the handling of news stories, sporting events and even weather reports, and by the very structure and presentation of national newspapers. He makes the point that every time 'Britain', 'British', 'Brits' or a map of Britain appears in the media or in other discourses, a statement is made about Britain as a united political, economic and cultural entity along the model of a family, with a common home. Thus 'the reproduction of a nation does not occur magically. Banal practices rather than conscious choice or collective acts of imagination are required. Just as a language will die rather for want of regular users, so a nation must be put to daily use' (95).

As the nation is routinely represented as a unified whole, so there is pressure to make the political unit the cultural unit. The government speaks for 'us' as 'a people' and what makes us a community is our 'lived experience', that which makes us part of a group. In this way the nation, our ethnicity and our cultural heritage are bonded together in a set of political and symbolic representations. The idea of a nation with a single cultural heritage is constructed with increasing vigour as the nation itself goes into decline, and the presentation of national identity is suffused with the fear of loss. A good example of this is the rise of the heritage industries in Britain and the discourse on British history and 'our' great literary tradition that came to the fore during the debates on the national curriculum.

Paul Gilroy, among many others, has argued against this representation of Britain as a cultural unit. In *There ain't no Black in the Union Jack* (1987) he argues that the construction of race is endemic to the process of nationalism. Tradition, history and culture are the criteria for commonality and, in effect, become codes for 'race'. Thus 'our' British culture is represented implicitly as a white culture, fixed by tradition and history. Those outside the white culture are, at best, marginal, at worst 'outsiders'. Gilroy's book, as the title implies, sets out some of the ways of resisting this totalising representation of Britain as one nation, and so as one culture – white.

Similarly, in the student reading by Forsythe, 'German Identity and the Problem of History', the image of the 'Gastarbeiter' as outsiders rests on the simplifying assumption that there is one German nation and 'a people' – Germans. But Germany, like any other nation, is constituted of regional, ethnic and cultural differences that mean the notion of 'Germaness' is contested from within. If Germany were routinely represented and understood in this way, as a political unit made up of many cultural groups, then the question of being an insider or an outsider would not be raised.

Some of the differences between the diverse communities that make up the 'nation' are described in Anthony Cohen's book, *Belonging* (1982). Here the notion of ethnicity is explored through studies of small rural communities, mainly on the periphery of Britain. These local communities are studied from two perspectives: how the members see their world and how the wider world impinges on them. The studies are concerned with how people experience and express differences from others and, crucially, how this sense of difference informs the nature of their social organisation. This sense of difference between 'us' and 'them' is constantly

Since Cohen's book is also about the impact of the wider world on the community, he discusses some of the conceptual and methodological issues that arise when studying how a community reacts to the centralising forces of the mainstream culture. He warns against the danger of looking at different elements of identity separately, such as work, family, language and so on, and seeing apparent similarities between this group's notion of work or family and the mainstream constructs. For example, the notion of 'the family' taken in isolation may look in form much the same as the generalised concept of the family used in the media and advertising. But that notion of the family will be linked to other important aspects of daily life such as friendship, neighbouring, reputation, etc. and the meaning of family within the network of relationships and responsibilities will mean something different in that particular context, from any other notion of family.

At the local level things become much more intricate and finely tuned. Cohen explains this by suggesting that at the level of group or small community, personal characteristics of individuals are more like public knowledge and so become the essential currency of community life. For example, reputations, certain patterns of behaviour, humour, knowledge of individuals' pasts will all feed into definitions of what makes a particular group belong together (see Unit 15 on Local Level Politics for further exploration of these ideas). This public knowledge means people must adjust to each other to produce order and coherence, rather than this coherence being imposed by some external notion of 'culture'. In other words, the concept of 'culture' is not a way of *explaining* difference, but of *describing* it.

Of course, boundaries in terms of groups can be drawn at many different levels from pan-national entities downwards. For example, as Shore and Black (1994) demonstrate, there are ongoing attempts to construct a 'European' identity. This will be an 'imagined community' indeed, as it seeks to impose some sort of unity and sense of allegiance on to such a diverse set of national and sub-national groups. The higher the level that is labelled, the more simplified it is – hence the national, and to a lesser extent regional, stereotypes which we use of others to shore up our own infinite complexity. And, as Gilroy suggests, national identities are more subject to racial ideologies than regional identities.

Cohen makes the important point that the differences perceived by a group could be called their 'culture' by outsiders, whereas if you are in the group you are not so much aware of it as 'culture' but as identity. That is to say, you think of yourself as Sevillanos, a student, a Catholic, a Marburger or a crofter – as belonging to that group, rather than having that culture. It is only when you come into contact with another group that your cultural practices – and also your linguistic ones – come into focus.

reinforced by contact at the boundary, which in itself helps to construct the difference. So people perceive themselves as different when they come into contact with another group and the sense of difference reinforces their perception of belonging to their own group. In this way, awareness and behaviour constantly work on each other. Awareness of belonging to a particular group may be a way of explaining people's behaviour, but such awareness may also make people consciously engage in the expression of difference.

Methodologically, there is always the danger of hearing the voice a particular community uses to the wider world – for example, to explain or defend itself when it feels under threat – as the voice used to its own members. A beginner ethnographer could easily assume that what they read or are told, as an outsider, is the way that community sees itself from within. The chances are that these messages to the outside are greatly simplified and highly condensed. To go beyond these messages will involve the ethnographer in a lot of participant observation and a gradual discovery of meaning through conversations and interactions over time.

In arguing for the local, Cohen writes that the myths and stereotypes of more general labelling 'are not absolutes, pickled or preserved for use when occasion requires. They are, rather, like empty receptacles, which are filled with local and particular experience' (15). However, this does not go very far in problematising the issues of ethnicity and stereotyping. Nor, perhaps, does Cohen's introduction raise some of the difficulties around the notion of shared values as holding a community together (as we have discussed above). As Kress (1988) suggests, 'societies consist of multiple social and cultural groupings, and interactions between and across such groups are as likely to involve contradiction and contestation as they are to involve sharing.'

In the article by Hobsbawm quoted earlier, a much more negative picture is painted of ethnicity. In modern, complex, largely urban societies throughout the world, a notion of 'us' is used to defend 'our' territories against immigrants: 'in some sense it is the idea of 'us' as a body of people united by an uncountable number of things 'we' have in common – a 'way of life' in the widest sense, a common territory of existence in which we live, whose landscape is familiar and recognizable. It is the existence of this which the influx from outside threatens' (7). This xenophobia is explained in terms of the general social disorientation which marks the later years of the twentieth century. Its strength is 'the fear of the unknown, of the darkness into which we may fall when the landmarks which seem to provide an objective, a permanent, a positive delimitation of our belonging together, disappear. And belonging together, preferably in groupings with visible badges of membership and recognition signs, is more important than ever in societies in which everything combines to destroy what binds human beings together into communities' (4). The ethnic group 'appears as the ultimate guarantee when society fails' and Hobsbawm concludes, in a very post-modern way, that xenophobia looks like becoming the mass ideology of the end of the twentieth century: 'What holds humanity together' he asserts, 'is a denial of what the human race has in common.'

This fractured and cynical view is the background to much recent thinking on identity, culture and differences as illustrated for example in Ruthford's *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference* (1990). In the introduction, Ruthford argues for a cultural politics that will address the notion of difference (Homi Bhabha in a final chapter suggests that 'difference' is a more appropriate word than 'diversity' because cultural or ethnic difference implies a hierarchy of power in which those that are perceived as different by the majority are in a subordinate and subject position). Ruthford argues for the notion of multiple identities rather than the idea of one identity and J. Weeks, in the same volume, suggests that identity is about what you have in common rather than any notion of fixed sharedness. Ruthford also suggests that for many, identity cannot be articulated in language since this

- ◆ Alter, P (1985). *Nationalism*. London: Arnold
- ◆ Anderson, B (1983). *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.
- ◆ Barth, F (ed.) (1969) *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the Social Organisation of Cultural Difference*. Boston: Little Brown
- ◆ Billig, M (1995) *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage Publications.
- ◆ Cohen, A.P. (1982). 'Belonging: the Experience of Culture' in Cohen, A.P. (ed.) *Belonging*. Manchester University Press, pp.1-17.

References

Students have drawn on the ideas in this unit for their own ethnographic research in a variety of ways. For example, one home ethnographic project combined concepts from this unit with those from Unit 15 (Local Level Politics) to provide an in-depth study of neighbourhood identities, relationships and rivalries in a small village which was literally divided into two groups by a natural boundary (a stream). Most projects are similar explorations focusing in fine-grained detail on aspects of identity in a local rather than a national context, and revealing diversity within the host culture rather than seeking out or deconstructing homogeneity. However, students may still need to consider the interplay between the local and the national whether they are focusing on eating habits, a regional dance, a local pétanque club or ways of paying compliments. Issues of national belonging and national identities will probably have some place in the intercultural encounter between student ethnographer and informants, even if the repercussions of this are difficult to unravel. Student ethnographers may find that they are themselves subject to stereotyping in these encounters, and that informants have brought with them a number of assumptions about e.g. 'the English'. The way informants present themselves may thus be inflected by anticipated national differences. At the very least, then, the material in this unit will be reflected in student projects through a heightened awareness of the pitfalls of stereotyping and of drawing unthinking conclusions about national traits from local and limited evidence.

This unit, then, touches on some of the recent debates on 'the nation' and what it means to belong to a community within that nation. It presents some of the arguments against a totalising and essentialist view of a particular national group, and instead illustrates some of the ways, both positive and negative, which people use to create a sense of belonging and of 'us' and 'them'. The notion of boundary is introduced both as a physical and political reality, as in the construction of social space and as a symbolic ordering of 'in' and 'out'. The boundary is marked by any number of signs and it is these signs, what they signify to members of a group, which hold people together rather than any essentialist categories. Of course, as Barth points out, these markers may vary over time, but the fact of boundary and boundary maintenance does not change.

language has been appropriated by dominant discourses. He concludes that it is at the margins of society, where all that is hated and ignored goes, that there is resistance to the hegemony of the centre. But even this position can be deconstructed, since margins vary according to the group's definition of the centre.

- ◆ Edwards, J (1985). *Language, Society and Identity*. Oxford: Blackwells.
- ◆ Forsythe, D (1986). 'German Identity and the Problem of History', in Tonkin, E., McDonald, M., Chapman, M. (eds.), *History and Ethnicity*. London: Routledge, pp.137-156.
- ◆ Gilroy, P (1987). *There Ain't no Black in the Union Jack: the Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. London: Hutchinson.
- ◆ Gellner (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. London: Blackwell.
- ◆ Hobsbawm, E.J. (1992). 'Ethnicity and Nationalism in Europe Today', in *Anthropology Today*, 8, 1992, 1, February, pp.3-8.
- ◆ Kaschuba, W (1995) 'Everyday Culture', in Shelley, M., and Winck, M, (eds.), *Aspects of European Cultural Diversity*. London: Routledge, pp.189-264.
- ◆ Kress, G (1988) *Communication and Culture*. New South Wales University Press.
- ◆ Larsen, S (1982) 'The Two Sides of the House: Identity and Social Organisation in Kibirony, Northern Ireland', in Cohen (ed.) *Belonging* (op cit.)
- ◆ Rutherford, J (ed.) (1990) *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- ◆ Williams, C and Smith, A (1983) 'The National Construction of Social Space' in *Progress in Human Geography* 7, 502-518

SECTION TWO

Summarise the main points student comments have drawn out, relating them where possible to the key aspects developed in the background notes (e.g. the idea of

usefully ask about identities. This section should not be too long. The aim is to begin 'making strange', to get some information about what students already think and feel concerning questions of identity as lived experience, and to awaken them to the types of question we can

Point out that when students are abroad, people may react to them according to stereotypes of e.g. Britishness. What do they think these stereotypes are? What stereotypes do they have of other national groups? Where do these come from? When and why are they used? Are they a threat to identity?

Elicit information about students' personal experiences of belonging to various groups and their own multiple identities. What are these? When do they come into play? Do students experience a sense of belonging predominantly with a local group (e.g. a village or region), a national group or an ethnic group? How are these feelings of belonging manifested or talked about?

Start the session off by eliciting from students their existing perceptions. Not only will they have prepared the Forsythe reading that problematises German identity, they will also be accustomed to reflecting on identities in general – including aspects of their own national or regional identity – since the interface between the national and the European is currently highlighted and debated with such frequency.

This should cover the main issues raised in the background notes to the unit and should introduce the concepts of national, ethnic and local identity, as well as belonging and boundaries, but it is better to begin with an interactive session than with a lecture;

2.1 Introduction

2. Description of a session

1. Introduction
2. Discussion of reading: D. Forsythe, 'German Identity and the Problem of History'
3. Britishness game
4. Video assignment: The Essential UK
5. Discussion of recommended further reading: S Larsen, 'The Two Sides of the House: Identity and Social Organisation in Kilboney, Northern Ireland' (Optional)
6. Conclude and refer to relevance of concepts to ethnographic research abroad and to student ethnographic projects.

1. Outline of a session

'imagined communities', the highlighting of identity at the 'boundaries', the ways 'banal nationalism' reinforces our belonging to the nation on a daily basis, etc).

2.2 Class discussion of reading: D. Forsythe, 'German Identity and the Problem of History'

The students should have prepared this reading prior to the session, highlighting issues of interest and considering the questions on the accompanying question sheet (see Section 3). This stays deliberately close to the development of the article to assist students in picking out some of the important points as they go along rather than requiring them to synthesise at this stage.

Begin by pointing out to students that, although this reading is already a piece of history as far as contemporary Germany is concerned, they have been asked to read it for the anthropological approach and the generic ideas about national and ethnic identity the German case-study draws out.

It may be useful to continue with one or two general questions about responses to the reading (e.g. 'Did anything in the reading surprise you?' or a more synthetic, overarching question such as 'Why is the German case particularly interesting?')

It is worth spending time to ensure that all the questions on the sheet are addressed, then wrapping up the exercise concisely by writing on the overhead the main, generic issues about identity that students have brought up in order to consolidate.

2.3 Britishness Game

This short activity is clearly linked to the concepts already introduced, and particularly to the notion of national identity as contested from within rather than as homogeneous. The question of 'degrees of Germanness' introduced by Forsythe is replaced by the question of degrees of Britishness: who is and who is not British? Who says so? Are some British people more British than others?

Divide students into small discussion groups of 3 or 4. Give them the list of categories of people likely to call themselves British (see Section 3) either on a handout or displayed on an OHT. Ask them to arrange these in a hierarchy of Britishness according to the perceived strength of their claim.

Ask them to concentrate in particular on the *reasons* for the ranking they have decided upon: what are the factors which influenced their decisions?

Leave around 10 minutes for group discussion, then take feedback. Photocopy the sheet in Section 3 onto a transparency and cut it into strips so that the categories can be rearranged on the overhead projector and examined afresh according to feedback from each student group. The factors students take into account should then be synthesised and analysed. These will probably include: place of birth, parental origin, ancestry and history (how many generations of one's family have been in a place), language, religion, rituals/customs, etc.

How do students relate to the image of England presented in the first two parts? This is stereotyped: middle-class, white, bowler-hatted, black-cabbed, rural, conservative, nostalgic, etc. It suggests the nation has a single cultural heritage and develops certain clichés about supposedly common values such as the notion of the

The video begins by concentrating on the idea of unity, which it then goes on to deconstruct by looking at fragmentation, multi-culturalism and the idea of a 'disunited kingdom'. Section 1 brings up the notion of natural boundaries and their effects (the UK and its island history, and the UK as 'reassuring, well-regulated and orderly'). Students should be prompted to comment on the visuals and sound track (e.g. the opening sequence panning in on the white cliffs of Dover; what do these cliffs signify? How does the camera-work play on images of this famous boundary? What role do the images of Turner paintings have here? And why is this particular music from Purcell chosen for the soundtrack at this point?)

The accompanying handout on which the assignment is based breaks the documentary up into six sections and contains questions for approaching each of them to guide analysis as students view. Ideally they should view the video carefully prior to the session. If there is time, all sections of the video should then be discussed in class, and selected clips shown and analysed. If time is limited, then analyse at least Section 1 and 2.

Students should also be reminded that this exercise involves analysing data of a particular order (e.g. not naturally occurring data, but a piece of journalism) and that they should be alert to several levels: the messages and the metamesages; the effect of the narrative and of its French narrator; the visuals; the sound track; and how these work together to produce an effect.

Explain again that the overarching issue here is that of the nation as 'imagined community', a 'common home' which is held together in part by a symbolic, mythical process. Recap also on the idea that the video is particularly interesting from this point of view, since its job is to present the UK to itself. Significantly, the makers of the film decided to use Cécile Côté, a French woman and therefore an outsider, to narrate.

This video is an extract from one of a 1992 series of BBC programmes which aimed to represent the different countries of Europe to British viewers (the whole series was entitled 'The Essential Europe'). Remind students that the video is being used because it provides an opportunity to focus on some of the ways in which national identity is talked about, constructed and maintained. It allows us to address the questions of how a nation represents itself (both to itself and to others) and of how it is represented by outsiders, by analysing data in a visual medium.

2.4 Video Assignment: 'The Essential History of the UK'

Other questions may arise from the activity. For example, how do people claiming to be British but not resident in Britain maintain a sense of belonging to a country in which they no longer live? How might one account for their continued allegiance? What are the processes through which they re-affirm their belonging, even in their absence?

- ◆ How the community presents itself to outsiders and tourists (the global, unified definition of the district as a single community, 'kindly Perrin').
- ◆ The ways in which boundaries are constructed in order to produce two Kilboneyes (orange and green colours; flags; objects, emblems and decorations; clothes; songs; separate newspapers and radio/television channels; territorial divisions in the main street between Catholic and Protestant sides, etc.).
- ◆ Strategies the two sides have developed for crossing boundaries.
- ◆ The patterning of interaction in daily routines (notably the notion of role dilemmas, avoidance strategies and the forms these take).

Elicit thoughts from the students on:

Contextualise the reading by referring to Cohen's book, *Belonging: The Experience of Culture* in which it appears (see background notes). The reading should be introduced as an opportunity to study an ethnographic piece of writing which attempts to get an insider view, dealing in fine-grained detail with identity as experienced from within. The way in which the national filters down to the small, local group should be stressed. Links with the Unit 15 on Local Level Politics which looks at identity and interactions in small communities should be mentioned as well.

2.5 Class discussion of recommended further reading: S. Larsen's 'The Two Sides of the House: Identity and Social Organisation in Kilboney, Northern Ireland' (optional)

Students may be asked how they would have gone about producing such an account. Would they have done it differently? They should also be asked what an ethnographer might do to try and get an insider perspective and how this would be different from the journalistic procedures used here (e.g. an attempt to capture the experiential sense of a culture and to describe, in fine-grained detail, what it feels like to belong there).

Work on the video should be concluded by recapping the main points and exploring the differences between an ethnographic account and this journalistic account which draws on quotes and imagery to make an argument about identity.

It is also useful to discuss a clip from the part in Section 3 which deals with Ireland's 'twenty years of blood, fire and tears' and whose imagery involves soldiers, military trucks, barbed wire and guns. This is a link between the video and the following reading on managing identities in a small community in Northern Ireland.

The Scottish section (Section 3) is also useful for exploring ideas of stereotypes, icons and symbols, and the idea of self-definition from within the group versus definition from without.

Englishman's home being his castle. How do students respond to the totalising statements about 'People today', 'we', 'Everyone knows the British obsession with...' in the film? Why are they being used?

The thrust of this unit is from the question of national – and also perhaps supra-national (e.g. European) identities to the expression of local identities. There are two suggested readings. One is a case-study stressing the problematic definition of national identity, the other an ethnographic case-study illustrating aspects of local identity. If students have covered some of the theories around national identities in another aspect of their university studies, teachers may prefer to give a summary of Forsythe's findings and to emphasise instead the reading about Kilbironney.

3. Advice and comments

In terms of the ways students have drawn on these concepts for ethnographic projects, point out that to purport to take something as unwieldy and nebulous as 'national identity' is inappropriate, but notions of national identity may be part of the research or of the research situation. The processes of imagining a community, or of constructing and maintaining group identity can be seen at work on many levels. The ways in which groups talk about themselves and present themselves to others are often analysed in projects, whether the group concerned be a family group, a group of friends, a group conscious of belonging to a particular region, village or street, a football team or a brass band competing with others. Ethnography is about groups, and some of the concepts introduced here will necessarily be of use.

What other issues may arise in becoming integrated into local groups when abroad? What kind of processes might be at work? How might this kind of situation become part of ethnographic research? And finally, will being an ethnographer provide them with a new identity in the host community?

Moving beyond the session and anticipating the period of residence abroad, do students see any new issues they may have to deal with in terms of identity? They may be confronted with the question 'who am I?' when they suddenly find themselves as 'the foreigner', on the periphery of much social interaction, as 'the language assistant' in a school or as 'an exchange student'. As has been suggested, people may well react to them according to stereotypes of e.g. Britishness.

Sum up the session's main points.

2.6 Conclusion

Finally the piece should be analysed as an example of ethnographic research procedures and ethnographic writing (verbatim data, reflexivity, the position of the researcher, etc.).

- ◆ The notion of moral communities and social networks (these will recur in Unit 15 on Local Level Politics).
- ◆ Special features of discourse (sparing use, for example, of the terms 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' in public, mixed gatherings and avoiding reference to 'the conflict'); note also the importance for the researcher of finding out about the meaning of insider terminology (e.g. the epithet 'good' living).

SECTION THREE

1. Assignment

- ◆ Video: *The Essential History of the UK (1992, 28 mins.)*

This is one of a series of BBC programmes which aims to represent the different countries of Europe to British viewers. This programme is narrated by a French woman, Cecile Cotte.

View the video, both in terms of its message and its metmessage, i.e. both for its overt and subliminal images.

Stop after each section and consider the questions below.

Section One (00.00-04.06 – from the opening to the comments that nostalgia is a fundamental British value)

1. The UK and its island history. Why do you think the programme starts with the white cliffs of Dover? Would you start a programme on the UK here?

2. The notion of the UK as isolated and protected is presented along with commentary that Britain is 'reassuring, well-regulated and orderly'. Why this connection? Or is no connection intended?

3. The historian, John Dunn, talks of what has made 'people today' and a 'distinctive society'. *Which people* is he talking of? Are we all members of this distinctive society?

Section Two (04.06-08.09 – From the opening commentary about the British love for symbols to Ken Loach on the monarchy as propaganda)

1. The narrator says 'we' are 'conservative by necessity'. Again, who is she describing? Are these 'national' values of nostalgia and conservatism part of our experience or a myth?

2. The monarchy is presented as both political expedient, maintaining the continuity of parliamentary government, and symbolically and ideologically as propaganda, a means of constructing and reconstructing the UK as unified state. Which of the two come through strongest in the visual sequence in this programme?

Section Three (08.09-13.36 – From the comments on 'cracks' in the UK to the idea of Scottish people looking for 'real skeletons' of identity)

1. Do you find inner contradictions in the way the Duke of Argyll presents himself?

2. He says that the problem with small nations is that 'other people define you'. He goes on to describe some of the signs that are used to sum up the Scottish. How do you react to the signs that are used to sum you up as a member of a national, regional or other cultural group?

- Section Four** (13.36-18.56 – From the contrast between Ascot and Glasgow Celtic to prayers at Dover Grammar School)
- 1 Class is represented in social rather than cultural terms. In the early part of the programme cultural generalisations were made about 'our' need for continuity in turning 'our' homes into 'paradise' and fundamental values of nostalgia and conservatism. These were presented through middle class eyes. What might be the generalisations about values that connect to the miners in the pub?
- 2 Do you see any irony, is any intended, in the visual images of the white, male boys and masters and the commentary on 'the spirit of unity and tolerance'?
- Section Five** (18.56 – 22.12 – From the suffragettes to 'women have it rough these days')
- 1 What do you make of the juxtaposition of the claims of women's independence and the shots of the jewellery department in an up-market store?
- Section Six** (22.12 – 28.15 – From the 1960s models to the end)
- 1 Britain as a multi-cultural society is presented as a historical and sociological process. But again, the cultural implications are not spelt out and the visual images are of Britain as having a consumer identity (shots of the street market). How do you account for the generalisations about values at the beginning of the programme and any lack of them in these latter parts?
- 2 This programme is an outsider's view in two ways: it is framed by the French narrator and it is a piece of journalism, drawing on quotes and imagery to make an argument. Compare this with what an ethnographer might do to try and get an insider's perspective. Does the French narration justify the stereotyped view, i.e. that to an outsider, a community has to present itself in clichés and stereotypes – a representation it would not make of itself?

HANDOUT 1 – arrange in degrees of Britishness

- 1) British people living under British sovereignty in Gibraltar / Falklands
- 2) People of British descent living in foreign countries (ex-colonies / others)
- 3) Emigrant British living in other Western countries (e.g. Spain)
- 4) English people born in England
- 5) People from ex-British colonies (English speakers)
- 6) People from ex-British colonies (non-English speakers)
- 7) Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish

- ◆ Diana Forsythe (1989) 'German Identity and the Problem of History', in E. Tonkin et al. (eds.) *History and Ethnicity* (ASA 27) (London / New York: Routledge) pp.137-156.

Please consider the above questions when you read the article and bring your findings to the session for discussion. The original contains some diagrams which we have been unable to include in this booklet.

1. What is Diana Forsythe's thesis?
2. How does she go about expounding it?
3. How is ethnic identity usually constructed?
4. Are there any differences in the ways ethnic majority and ethnic minority status are perceived?
5. What kinds of consequence does the Germans' relationship with their own history have?
6. What uses are there for the term 'boundaries'?
7. What categories are involved in the discussion of the location of Germany?
8. What categories does Forsythe use to discuss Germanness?
9. What problems arise in Germany from the use of the term 'Ausländer'?
10. In what terms does Forsythe discuss 'what it feels like to be German'?
11. What has affected German attitudes towards being German?

Introduction

The problem with which I am concerned is the nature of contemporary German identity and its expression during everyday life. This implies not only such questions as how people understand and use the word German, and what they say and do in the name of Germanness, but also what it means to them to feel – or not to feel – German.

The German case is interesting for a number of reasons. First, in contrast to the minority cultures that anthropologists usually seek out for study (Cole, 1977), German culture is unquestionably a majority tradition. Perhaps in part for this reason, it has received relatively little attention from Anglophone anthropologists (Forsythe, 1984). Second, studying German identity allows us to investigate ethnic-majority status as it is perceived from within. As is well known, ethnic identity tends to be created through a process of opposition (Epstein, 1978:xii). Ethnic minorities typically construct their identity through contrast to some majority tradition. Because the anthropological literature tends to depict